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## 1976 Vol. 05: Enlarged Council -- Solidarity

The Generalate Team

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The Generalate Team / 76-5, June 1976

## Enlarged Council – Solidarity

### The Day After the Ascension

*It was the day after the feast of the Ascension, as we assembled in the large parlor of the Generalate, not unlike the Apostles in the Cenacle, to begin the first session of the First Enlarged Council, on the subject of Solidarity. We wanted to have this meeting during the Pentecost Novena, a very special time for Spiritans, a time for more intense devotion to the Spirit.*

*Right at the beginning, a meaningful thing happened. In order to facilitate matters, it had been proposed to divide into two work-groups, one English-speaking, the other French-speaking. After only fifteen minutes of separation, there was a reaction; "it won't work this way; we have to break these 'blocks' and work together in international groups." This episode was the "flag-raiser" for the whole Council; getting beyond frontiers, in a word, internationality.*

### The Eve of Pentecost

*The Eve of Pentecost was the day when three projects of highest priority were voted unanimously: Angola, Paraguay and Pakistan. Three projects, three continents! Three projects undertaken in co-responsibility by all the Major Superiors. Three projects which, taken together, will test some of our options in Mission today and our will to begin anew: urgent missionary situations; international teams; poverty and liberation; first evangelization; dialogue with Islam and an opening to the Far East! There was great happiness indeed, on the eve of Pentecost!*

common concern," said one. This faith in the Mission was really striking, and it was obvious that we all shared it.

"For the sake of the Gospel," we face the double problem of our diminishing personnel and the advancing age of the confreres, which makes it impossible for us to hold on to all the commitments we have inherited from the past. "For the sake of the Gospel," we are willing to respond to new and urgent appeals and to commit ourselves to the missionary needs of today. "We must not follow a policy whereby our present commitments would prevent us from undertaking new ones." "It is our duty as a Congregation to respond to new appeals of Mission." These are some of the statements by which working committees expressed this willingness of the Enlarged Council to reexamine our commitments and determine our priorities in line with No. 13 of *Guidelines for Animation*.

The Enlarged Council's decisions concerning missionary priorities represent a first step, a realistic one, full of promise:

- "Provincial and Principal Superiors will send to the General Council by October 1, a list of the most urgent priorities in their circumscriptions."
- "The General Council, taking into account all its sources of information, will present to the whole Congregation three projects of highest priority." (cf. p. 2)
- "Provincial and Principal Superiors commit themselves, in dealing with the confreres of their jurisdiction, to support the requests for personnel in view of these three projects . . ."

From the very first day of our work together, we experienced something which would only intensify as the days went on: the sense of co-responsibility or collegiality of the Major Superiors in the work, the orientation and the commitments of the Congregation. A giant step had been taken in getting beyond the hide-bound divisions of Provinces and Districts (i.e. the Provinces and "their" Districts). Lived experience transcends structures. Fraternal communion is stronger than power.

### 1. Missionary Priorities

Another small but meaningful note was the fact that all committees changed the proposed order of subjects to be treated, and put mission priorities in first place. "It's Mission that is our



## 2. Internationality

The decisions under this heading were not sensational. Let us just mention:

- "It is expected that all confreres strive to become bilingual (i.e. with knowledge of two languages which are 'internationally useful')."
- "Under the responsibility of the Major Superiors, programs for the formation of young Spiritans will include obligatory study and practice in the use of at least one living foreign language."

But there was more to it than those few decisions. The Enlarged Council of 1976 was strongly marked by internationality, in the sense of transcendence of all sorts of frontiers, linguistic, national, continental, etc. . . . It was involved in most of the decisions and orientations arrived at, with respect to all the themes concerning solidarity. The Council decided: "We must develop more and more the international character of the Congregation as the 1974 Chapter recommended." And we shall. "Why all this stress on internationality, all of a sudden? Is it a new fad?" Several reasons were brought out by the members of the Enlarged Council:

- Today, Mission is also called mutual help and exchange between Churches. Let us make our contribution to this Mission, we who call upon the richness of so many particular Churches.
- At a time of international tension, international conflicts, racism, international injustices, let us be a sign of the brotherhood that can be; a sign of the Mission of Christ which aims to bring together, to unite, to reconcile. Let ours be a "ministry of communion."
- The current insistence upon the Local Church runs the risk of leading to a certain turning-in of these Churches upon themselves. Let us be witnesses to the universal.
- National blocks are less and less tolerated. The past has a lesson to teach us here.
- Some missionary situations require international teams. Some ask for missionaries from the Third World. Some seek specialists whom the particular Provinces would find it hard to furnish. We must prepare ourselves for a better service in the Mission, for a better deployment of personnel.

Above all, it is today's Mission which is pushing us toward internationality, but there is as well, our concern for our own Congregation:

- The Congregation is too Western. Its members come, for the most part, from countries frequently opposed by the Third World.

- The Congregation, especially in its organization, is still strongly marked by an epoch which is past. A limited degree of internationality is no longer enough for our times. The centers of gravity of both the Church and the world are changing. Third World peoples are becoming more and more important, especially in the East.
- Internationality is also a necessity for coming to the aid of provinces in difficulty; for developing our unity.

As one participant remarked, "Internationality could well be the test of whether or not we are, and will continue to be, a living Congregation."

## 3. Spiritan Foundations

All the reasons mentioned above also underlie the question of new Spiritan Foundations. The principal object, however, is to recruit missionaries in the local Churches.

A special committee studied the whole question, making use of an informational document which drew attention to these facts about our foundations:

- In Nigeria, six Spiritans will be ordained this year. We have 39 priests, 50 scholastics, and five novices. The District needs two philosophy professors.
- In the East African Foundation (Usa River) there are 11 students in the orientation program, nine novices, seven students in philosophy and nine in theology. Here too there is need for personnel.
- In Angola, a novitiate was opened in November, 1975. At Holy Ghost College, there are five theologians, three philosophers, and 17 boys finishing secondary school.
- In South Brazil, there are now 15 students in philosophy and seven in theology at Sao Paulo.
- The United States Province West, in September 1976, will open a house of studies for Blacks in Louisiana.
- The District of Puerto Rico will soon open a house for aspirants.

The committee gave most of its attention to the project of a French-speaking foundation. There are already some requests, and a decision had to be made for these candidates: "They will spend a year teaching in the Apostolic School of Ihiala (Nigeria). This will enable them to improve their knowledge of English. The following year they will be admitted to the novitiate at Awo-Omama (Nigeria)."

For the future, the Enlarged Council approved propositions which will be presented at the Pan-African Spiritan Conference in December 1976:

- the creation of a French-speaking novitiate;
- a common theologate for all African Spiritans.



#### 4. Formation

Internationality and co-responsibility, dominant characteristics of the 1976 Enlarged Council, also put their mark upon the discussions and the decisions concerning formation.

There were some concrete problems which served as the point of departure: the diminishing number of young confreres, their situation as a small minority, change or disappearance of the large scholasticates of former times, search for new patterns, grouping in consortia, a too nationalistic formation, lack of cultural exchange, etc. . . .

In this area, as in so many others, it was principally Mission and our missionary options which caused us to give particular attention to the period of formation. We can truly say that our missionary policy is becoming clearer and clearer now, and the General Council is very grateful to the Major Superiors and those whom they represent for their important contribution and support in this respect.

As soon as we turn our attention to missionary situations, no matter where they may be, as soon as we clarify our priorities at Congregation level, as soon as we try to transcend our many kinds of frontiers in view of better service in the Mission (cf. Internationality), we come face to face with new directions which we must take regarding the period of formation. Our houses of formation throughout the Congregation must take inspiration from the very terminology of today's mission: openness, exchange, mutual help, meeting-of-minds, inter-cultural encounters.

It is against this background of Mission problems that the decisions made by the Enlarged Council must be understood. It must be remembered too that they represent only a beginning:

- "... the Enlarged council recommends an exchange of students among the different Provinces. This implies that the Major Superiors keep one another informed of possibilities in their areas for formation; houses, locations and occasions favorable to international meetings; types of academic programs, diplomas and degrees obtainable."
- "With respect to consortia where we have an obligation to furnish teaching personnel, the Enlarged council requests:
  - that the Provincials concerned present to the General Council a clear listing of the needs of their Provinces;
  - that the General Council present to the other provinces these calls for international help."

Finally, there was an important decision which will have to be made more specific in the months to come by all the Superiors and Directors concerned:

- "The Enlarged Council decides that there will take place periodically, international meetings of Spiritans in formation. Under the auspices of the General Council and the Provincials, these meetings will be occasions for a 'formation-experience' and will last for several weeks during the summer."

The spirit of what was said about formation goes much further than the mere letter of the decisions. It is a spirit of openness, mutual help, exchange and meeting-of-minds at Congregation level, on the part of directors, professors and students.

#### 5. International Meeting of Young Spiritans

An event! A one-time affair! A meeting of young Spiritans from all countries, races and languages. A meeting going beyond frontiers!

Almost everywhere in our Provinces and Districts, the young represent a minority. This is a phenomenon which will become more and more evident. We know the difficulties every minority meets with.

Times have changed. The Church and her Mission have evolved. The young have different ideals. They have their own problems. The future is not as clear as it used to be.

It is our hope that the young may have the chance to "feel at home" in today's Mission and in the Congregation. It is our hope that the young Spiritans, scattered all over the Congregation, in small numbers in our Provinces and Districts, may have a chance to meet one another, to find out what they have in common, and, above all, to live through an experience together.

One Provincial spoke of a "new deal," a new beginning, a new upsurge for the Congregation. And it will be to the benefit of all of us.

A bold project! There will be no lack of objections and difficulties. We must place the same confidence in the young as we place in the older confreres.

The Enlarged Council was not afraid to vote unanimously in favor of it! "The Enlarged Council decides that there shall be an international meeting of young Spiritans. The General Council, in dialogue with the Major Superiors, is responsible for the realization of this project." (Enclosed you will find a more explicit presentation of this project.)

#### 6. Finance and Pension/Insurance

The elderly confreres were not forgotten. The 1974 Chapter spoke of the need to establish a pension fund in all the Provinces. With this in mind, a considerable sum of money was distributed among the Provinces by the General Administration "taking into account their diversity and the solidarity which should exist throughout the whole Congregation." This too was done



in an admirable spirit of solidarity and understanding.

### 7. Three Priorities for the Congregation

The Eve of Pentecost was an important day for us all. What happened that day?

The members of the Enlarged Council had asked the General Council to present three priorities for the Congregation as a whole. The Major Superiors would make a judgment about them. If they approved of them, they would commit themselves in solidarity to furnish the necessary personnel. All this was important because of the significance of the projects and of the response which would be given.

**Angola (Africa):** The situation is urgent, the conditions are existing and the pastoral project needs international teams. "Project Angola," worked out in dialogue with the Bishops of Malanje and Saurimo, envisions two or three teams for these two dioceses for the following objectives: a mobile team for the formation of catechists and community leaders; teams for ongoing formation for priests and religious, for youth work and communications. There is already one team made up of one Portuguese and two English Fathers; a French confrere and a young confrere from Ireland have also been proposed.

**Paraguay (Latin America):** Urgent missionary situations in line with our options; poor people, with no one to take care of them; youth work; a pastoral plan inspired by Medellin; basic communities and liberation. One Province, Trinidad, has been active there, but can no longer furnish personnel for a Spiritan presence of the type desired today, i.e. three or four teams, international if possible, offering the opportunity for further internationalization of the Congregation. As a beginner, "Project Paraguay" envisions eight or nine Spiritans to constitute two or three international teams for the Dioceses of Concepcion and Asuncion.

**Pakistan (The East-Asia):** The first appeals from Pakistan reached us about a year ago. Since then, we have been in regular contact with the Bishops of Lyallpur and Lahore. From our correspondence we know that there is an urgent need of personnel; it is a missionary situation in line with our options: first evangelization among the tribes of Sind and in the Punjab region, dialogue with Islam, pastoral work for forming leaders for small, poor, Christian communities. The General Council was faced with the question: should the Congregation make a commitment in Asia also? To answer it, we needed the advice and the decision of the Enlarged Council.

It would be impossible to adequately describe

what happened during the hour following the presentation of these projects on the eve of Pentecost.

Provincials and Principal Superiors who are known to have "their feet on the ground and their heads on their shoulders" spoke as they never spoke before. They all stressed the need for the Congregation to commit itself to something new, like the projects proposed, and to go even further. Everybody spoke in favor of the venture in the East. One of these days we will publish the important comments which were made. The time came to decide. The vote was unanimous for the three projects.

The vote was decisive, significant, full of meaning. It suggests that:

- The Congregation is committing itself more and more to the missionary tasks of today and of the future.
- The Congregation is open to missionary situations beyond its own frontiers. It can pay attention to them and respond to them.
- The Congregation is open to the East, while still maintaining its privileged ties with Africa. It is taking advantage of an opportunity to become more international, to diversify its commitments more, by a presence on several continents.
- A new strength, that of co-responsibility, is developing in the Congregation and is full of promise. This was made actual, sealed, if you will, by taking on these three projects as a common effort.
- For the General Council, it represents the approval and support of a certain missionary policy, a sign of the confidence and support of the Major Superiors. In return, the General Council expresses its full confidence in the Major Superiors, congratulates them for their spirit of openness and collaboration, and thanks them for their precious contribution to the Enlarged Council and to all our work.

After these decisions had been made, the atmosphere was one of celebration! "Why should we go back to work this afternoon? Why go on discussing the scheduled subject of relationships between Provinces and Districts and the Generalate, now that it was clear that there already exists the best of relationships, collaboration and coresponsibility? Wouldn't it be better to rejoice together as brothers?"

So the last decision of the Enlarged Council was "to declare a holiday." The Superior General's closing address came right from his heart and spoke to our hearts! More than one Provincial "spoke in tongues," the tongues of other Provinces. Then we drank a toast in the wines of our different countries. . . It was the eve of Pentecost!